

Transformation —more than just a word

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WASHINGTON – “Herding squirrels on a flatbed trailer down I-95 in rush hour.” That is how William Navas, Jr., describes his role as Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Manpower and Reserve Affairs.

But the retired Major General plays a critical role in leading the department that is largely responsible for striking the right balance of people, both military and civilian, with the right balance of technology to maximize the success of Naval and Marine Corps operations. This translates into reviewing the needs and core competencies of the Navy and Marine Corps, deciding what they should and should not be responsible for, then deciding if the needs are better met by personnel or technology.

For example, in a day and age when eye glasses can be bought and ready in an hour at just about any civilian shopping center, the question must be posed as to whether maintaining a very expensive optical shop that services the entire Navy from Yorktown, Virginia, is really optimal? Or could that function be outsourced through a voucher system?

Navas explains that in his view, during the cold war era the Navy became very comfortable working on a tactical and operations level. Today, our adversaries are working at a strategic level and bypassing tactics and ops.

“Look at Spain, and how the terrorists, in one week, changed a political system in a country. We need to start thinking [like them] at a strategic level...so we need change,” said Navas. “Our [changed] military needs to be agile and cannot be economically weak.”

As transformation sweeps the Department of the Navy, Manpower and Reserve Affairs is conducting an inventory of what is – and is not – a core competency. The focus is on functions that can be outsourced to the civilian sector and those functions that are essentially military.

“For those functions inherently military, the question then becomes: can it be done by Reserves?” said Navas. He notes a Reservist can cost as little as one-fifth that of an active-duty person in a function.

“We have to reshape the expectations, structure and the training of the Navy Reserve. We need to design and rearrange a Reserve that fits with the paradigm shift of the Navy. One that’s fully integrated and one that eliminates layers of bureaucracy with non-necessary missions,” he said.

According to the Navas, almost 70 percent of the Navy’s budget is allocated to manpower issues. That is a large piece of the pie, when you consider the Navy has more retirees on its payroll than active-duty personnel, and retirements continue to rise. Along with looking at how the Navy can cost-effectively utilize Reservists and civilians, Manpower and Reserve Affairs is examining issues of retirement to make the most sense for a 21st century workforce.

“The new generation will run out of money before they run out of life,” Navas said. “We must plan for the future through innovative measures, perhaps through means like 401K plans.”

For all the change the Secretary is proposing, he admits there is anxiety in the ranks.

“There is a lot of angst through this process, but we need balance,” Navas said. “If we don’t change today to something affordable, down the road one of two things will happen: Congress will fund human resources at the expense of readiness, or we are going to economically collapse, and we will all be on a sinking ship.”

Navas acknowledges change is hard.

“Change, at best, is inconvenient. If we don’t change, we are going to guarantee that we’re not going to survive,” he said. “We have got to get our people to realize certain death versus a chance at survival. A lot of people don’t want to see that ball of fire coming straight for them, so it’s my job to make sure the Navy has a fighting chance.” ♦



Navy Reserve Seabees killed in Iraq

RADM John M. Stewart Jr.,

Commander, Naval Reserve Readiness Command Southeast

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. – On April 30, and again on May 2, Sailors from Naval Mobile Construction Battalion 14 (NMCB-14) were attacked and killed in action, while serving in Iraq.

This is a tragic loss, and our hearts and prayers go out for the families and friends of the seven Sailors killed in action and 34 wounded in action.

These outstanding citizen Sailors were serving in Iraq to help rebuild and improve the infrastructure of the once-oppressed nation.

They were rebuilding schools, helping to restore water and electrical power - they were serving in a humanitarian capacity, going into harm's way to give others the chance for freedom.

This loss, however painful, does not cause us to waiver in our conviction to complete our mission.

Every day thousands of men and women in our all-volunteer

service face the challenges brought about by enemies of freedom, and they do so willfully and with great professionalism.

These Seabees, killed and wounded in action are part of that proud and honorable group that have served our nation, and continue serve, with honor, courage and commitment.

Their families, friends, and fellow Seabees now bear the pain and sorrow of their loss, and for that, our nation can never thank them enough.

On behalf of the U.S. Navy, our deepest sympathies go out to all of you for our lost and injured shipmates; they will be remembered fondly and greatly missed. We will forever cherish their memory and honor their sacrifice for freedom and democracy.

These fallen shipmates are strong examples of the words inscribed on the Seabee Memorial at Arlington National Cemetery... "With compassion for others, we build, we fight, for peace and freedom." ♦